

# SOCIAL ACTION NEWSLETTER

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## ALCOHOL CONTRIBUTED TO DEFEAT, SAYS PETAIN GOVERNMENT

France, famous for its wines and the home of light, carefree, joyous living, now says that alcohol contributed largely to the defeat of the French forces. A statement released by the Petain government at Vichy on August 24 blames "a disastrous era of alcoholism among French soldiers" for the failure of the army to withstand the German blitzkrieg. A spokesman for the government declared that during the eight months of relative inaction on the Western Front, French soldiers drank tremendous amounts of alcohol to while away the monotonous hours spent in underground fortifications and that widespread intoxication is largely to blame for the collapse of French resistance. Alcohol-soaked nerves were unable to stand up against such terrifying weapons as dive bombers, shriek bombs, flame-throwers and swarms of enemy tanks. Along with this statement United Press also reports that the Petain government has established partial prohibition in unoccupied France. A decree has been issued forbidding the sale of certain types of alcoholic beverages three days a week and limiting the alcohol content of beverages to not more than 16 percent. No drinks may be served to youths under twenty and beverages with an anise alcohol base (such as absinthe and pernod) and 'fantasy aperitifs', which generally have an industrial alcohol base, are banned altogether. The decree does not ban fruit alcohol beverages, such as cognac, rum, armagnac and eau de vie.

In commenting upon the decree, J.W.T. Mason, U. P. news commentator, stresses the importance of the admission of French authorities that heavy drinking was responsible for defeat. Intoxication produced a neurotic condition among the troops which made it impossible for them to stand up against Hitler's terrorist tactics. Retreating armies are always subject to the danger of panic. Again and again throughout history battles have been lost because troops were suddenly seized with panic. The French army, its lines broken and many units deserted by their officers, harassed by dive bombers, shriek-bombs and machine-gun fire from low flying planes and mowed down by hordes of enemy tanks, faced a terror unparalleled in the history of warfare. Under such conditions even seasoned soldiers of iron nerves are likely to give way to panic. The danger is multiplied a hundred-fold where troops have been heavy users of alcohol. Hitler has developed this 'psychological warfare' or 'war of nerves' to a very high degree of effectiveness and directs it not only against troops in the field, but also against civilian populations.

While this statement of the Petain regime finds much corroboration in the known facts about the collapse of the French forces, it cannot be accepted as a complete explanation. Other and highly important forces were at work behind the lines. Facts such as those recorded by Heinz Poll in articles in The Nation under the dates of July 6 and 13 must be taken into account. The Petain regime is intent upon finding excuses for French defeat and seemingly determined to cast as much discredit as possible upon the government of the Third Republic. The impression prevails that the French troops fought gallantly under heavy disadvantages. Then too, there are other questions that must be answered. The wine ration of the French soldiers is confined to the cheap red and white wines of low alcoholic content and army pay (approximately \$1.50 per month) does not permit extensive alcoholic indulgence. The officer class, better paid and less subject to restrictions of personal habits, may have been the chief offenders. This would account for reports of precipitate flight on the part of many of them. The monotony of barrack life often breaks down morale. It is a well established scientific fact that long continued use of alcohol or excessive use tends to produce in the user a state of nervous disorganization. An alcohol addict recovering from a debauch is characterized by palsied hands, twitching muscles, befogged brain and a high degree of nervous excitability.

The French have long been the greatest consumers of alcohol in Europe. In 1935 the Blue Cross, a French temperance organization, placed the per capita consumption at 17.5 liters per year, (a liter is slightly more than a quart), as against 8.99 liters per capita for Belgium, 6.23 for England, and 2.71 for Germany. In addition, there were in 1925 some 2,739,244 small, untaxed farm distilleries ("boilleurs de cru") whose owners were permitted by law to distill not to exceed 10 liters of alcohol per year for family consumption. The inability of the government to control the output of these plants contributed to the scandalous illicit liquor business in France.

In the meantime, other nations will do well to take note of this charge that alcoholism among troops makes them neurotic and easy victims in a warfare in which shattering of nerves is one of the principal objectives.



## THE CHURCHES AND THE CONSCRIPTION LAW

Enactment by congress of the Burke-Wadsworth Bill confronts the peace forces of the nation, and particularly those religious bodies which have taken a definite stand against war and compulsory military service with some immediate problems which may become acute with the calling of the first contingent of 400,000 men. These problems concern not simply the status of the conscientious objector, but the rights of ministers of the gospel to exercise their functions as spiritual advisors. Much will depend upon the character of the regulations which govern the actions of local draft boards in their dealings with the men whose numbers are drawn for service. These regulations have not yet been made public, though it is reported that two of the six volumes are ready. More depends upon the makeup of the local boards. Unfortunately such information as is available is not encouraging. Local boards are appointed by the President on recommendation of the Governors of the several states. News reports from several states indicate that Governors are leaning heavily upon American Legionnaires, politicians, and advocates of strong national defense. Unquestionably many persons selected for this important service will be strongly prejudiced against conscientious objectors and will be inclined to deal harshly with them.

The first task of the peace forces lies in Washington. We must make certain that the rights of pacifists and conscientious objectors under the law are adequately safeguarded in the regulations. Those who have had conferences with Major General Shedd, Assistant Chief of Staff in charge of personnel and talked of for director of the draft, report that he holds a sympathetic understanding of the conscientious objector problem and is anxious to carry out the provisions of the law with as little friction as possible. At a meeting of the peace leaders of the major communions held in New York on September 16 at the call of the Federal Council of Churches, it was decided to ask the Federal Council to send a representative to Washington to be available for consultation with draft officials on conscientious objector problems as they arise. It is assumed that this will mean the opening of a Federal Council office in Washington for the duration of the emergency.

A second responsibility concerns conscientious objectors who may be assigned to work of national importance under civilian direction under the terms of section 5 (g) of the law. This section provides that a conscientious objector may be assigned to noncombatant service with the armed forces, provided he is willing to accept such service, or "to work of national importance under civilian direction." Nobody knows as yet what that means. Does it mean that the government will provide projects comparable to the C. C. C. to which conscientious objectors can be assigned at soldier pay and maintenance? Does it mean that he will be permitted to continue in his present job if that is judged to be "work of national importance"? Does it mean that the government will throw the conscientious objector back upon the churches and the peace agencies and demand that they provide approved projects upon which he will be allowed to work at the expense of his sponsors? Conscientious objectors could hardly be assigned to PWA projects such as the Grand Coulee Dam, since these are relief projects and the use of relief funds for such purposes would be questioned. In the experience of Britain it has been found that thirty-three and one-third per cent of the conscientious objectors have been willing to accept noncombatant service with the armed forces. About forty per cent have been assigned to work of national importance under civilian direction, seventy-five per cent of whom have been allowed to remain in the positions they held at the time of being called. If our problem works out on this pattern it will be considerably simplified. However, the American Friends Service Committee is proceeding on the assumption that the churches will be required to assume complete responsibility for conscientious objectors and is counseling with the government upon that basis. It is possible that the government will make the Friends Service Committee the official agency for dealing with conscientious objectors of all faiths. This will entail close cooperation with that organization on the part of all religious bodies.

A third task lies with the local church. Every pastor who has in his congregation conscientious objectors should immediately begin counseling with them concerning the grounds of their convictions, especially with those who are within the draft age. Where possible pastors ought to make the acquaintance of members of local boards in order to give them an intelligent understanding of conscientious objector problems which they are likely to have to face. If members of local boards understand that conscientious objectors are not 'slackers', cowards or 'fifth columnists', but are men of deep religious conviction who are just as loyal to the country as others, it will do much to allay prejudice and injustice. In the next place, churches which have within their membership persons who are conscientious objectors should at once begin to aid such individuals in a re-examination of their pacifist faith. The draftee who goes before a local board and pleads exemption on the ground of conscientious objection to war on religious grounds without having a thorough knowledge of the facts upon which he bases such a conviction will undoubtedly receive scant consideration. The Department of Social Education and Social Action will give prompt answers to requests for guidance on this subject. Churches which have not yet taken the Conscientious Objector Enrollment as recommended by the International Convention should do so at once, sending to the Department of Social Education and Social Action for the number of cards needed. When a member of the church who is registered as a conscientious objector is called before the draft board it is important that the pastor or some one who can speak for the church go with him to the hearing in order to certify to the fact of his registration and give evidence of the sincerity of his pacifist convictions. The church should also undertake to see that his right of appeal under the law is protected and that every opportunity is accorded him to prove the sincerity of his convictions. In this connection, steps are being taken to set up committees in every state and area of our brotherhood which will undertake to give aid and counsel to conscientious objectors who are called.



The annual convention of the United Automobile Workers Union (CIO) held in St. Louis, July 29-August 6 went on record against peacetime military conscription in a resolution which cited the opinion of competent authorities to the effect that no necessity exists for compulsory conscription and declared that "one of the main precepts of this form of government is voluntary military service in peacetime and no large standing army; compulsory military conscription is entirely foreign to our mode of life and existence and is a potential danger to organized labor and individuals connected with the labor movement." Their convention, therefore, registered itself as "unalterably opposed to any form of compulsory military service at this time" and pledged itself "to do everything in its power to prevent this from taking place." The convention also passed a resolution condemning dictatorships in Germany, Italy, Russia and Japan.

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More than 26% of the \$3,246,633,000 loaned to distressed home-owners by the Home Owners Loan Corp., a New Deal agency, has been repaid, according to a statement released by the HOLC on August 23. Nearly \$864,000,000 in principal repayments had been received by the end of the fiscal year, June 30. Of this amount \$183,000,000 represented payments of 77,141 borrowers who had repaid their loans in full. This agency was established in the depth of the depression to enable distressed homeowners to save their properties. Figures show that the average borrower was delinquent more than two years in principal and interest payments when the government stepped in with long-term amortized loans at a low rate of interest to enable them to rehabilitate themselves. The HOLC closed its lending period on June 12, 1936.

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If the entire 1940 wheat crop plus the supply in the ever-normal granary (wheat from previous harvests on which the government has made loans and holds in storage) were used for food, it would provide every man, woman and child in the United States with twice as much bread, cereal and other wheat foods as each ate in the entire year of 1939, according to a statement released on August 22 by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. This statement seems to raise some question as to how much overproduction is actually taking place in agriculture.

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In 1939 some 1,381,500 boys and girls were enrolled in 79,500 4-H Clubs in the forty-eight States, Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico, according to the Extension Service of the Department of Agriculture. More than 8 million young people have received 4-H training since the movement was started in 1914.

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For the past two years a conference on social education and social action led by James A. Crain has been a feature of the program of the National Convention of Negro Churches of Disciples of Christ. At the convention held in Little Rock, Arkansas in August the conference group decided to constitute itself a continuing body for the purpose of studying social problems as related to Negroes and to cooperate with the Department of Social Education and Social Action of The United Christian Missionary Society. Dean Jason M. Cowan, of Southern Christian Institute is chairman.

Approximately 4,000,000 men, women and children wander over the United States each year in search of work, according to Rep. John H. Tolan, of California, chairman of a Congressional committee investigating inter-state migration. The statement was made at the conclusion of a three-day hearing conducted in Chicago. These migrants come in about equal numbers from rural and urban areas, according to information given to the committee. Witnesses at the hearing insisted that the problem is a national one and should be handled by the federal government rather than by the several States.

In May the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee, seeking to find out what causes American farmers to turn migrant, called in Carl C. Taylor, head of the Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare of the Department of Agriculture, Conrad Taeuber, agricultural economist of the same department, and Frank Lorimer, professor of Populations Studies at American University. Testimony given by these experts showed that in 1929 there were about 1,700,000 farms which yielded gross incomes of less than \$600 per year. Of this sum not less than \$25 per month or \$300 per year went for necessary operating costs, leaving an average of not more than \$25 per month for clothing, medicine and all the necessary family expenses. These farms sheltered 7,700,000 men, women, and children. Another 900,000 farms provided an income of less than \$400 each. There are between 500,000 and 600,000 farms on land so poor that it will literally starve the families living on them if they continue to try to make a living by farming it, the committee was told. The families in this group include 2,500,000 to 3,000,000 persons. Dr. Taylor testified that by conservative estimate one-third of the farm families of the nation are living on standards of life so low as to make them slum families. A study of farm incomes made for the Brookings Institution by Levin, Moulton, and Warburton, covering the year 1929 showed that the average income of city people was \$908, while that of farm people was \$273. These per capita figures, including as they do all farm incomes, reflect a degree of prosperity far above that received by the families living on the types of farms mentioned above. The Report of the National Emergency Council on Economic Conditions in the South shows that average gross income of Southern farmers was \$186, from which he had to pay operating expenses. The income of the average Southern tenant was \$73 per person, while the average income of sharecroppers ranged from \$38 to \$87 per person.

These facts have tremendous significance for American Protestant bodies which have large rural constituencies. They are especially significant for the Disciples of Christ who have a large number of rural churches in some of the areas most vitally affected by declining agricultural income. Agricultural communities in Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma have been hard hit. Rural churches throughout the cotton producing areas of the South have died by the hundreds. This situation also has its implications for declining missionary and benevolent receipts. Families reduced to the sort of incomes described above cannot support the church.



Word has been received through the mimeographed newsletter issued by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in London that the French brothers, Philippe and Pierre Vernier, who were condemned to prison for refusing to do military service, have now been released. Pastors of Protestant churches in Belgium, they voluntarily returned to France at the outbreak of the war. Called for military service, they refused military service on the ground of their Christian faith. When brought to trial by court martial on February 22, 1940, Philippe said to the court, "I should like to say, gentlemen, that in my attitude there is nothing expressing judgment regarding any one of you, nor regarding any of those who are fighting... I know many officers and soldiers are much better men than I. I am only a poor sinner, full of faults and worse than they in many respects; but I believe it my duty this very day and on this particular point to declare clearly my conviction ... that the Bible cannot sanction war and that it is impossible for me to kill. ... I take my stand on Christian principle." When his brother Pierre was brought to trial, he said, "I do not want to be a martyr. I wish I could be acquitted and live free like other people. But I cannot, I cannot take up arms. In the name of all the young men, I declare our anguish to you who are older and wiser. There is nothing but night before us. ... But at this moment I can only go to prison; for I cannot fight, except with the weapons of the spirit."

The prosecutor replied, "You Verniers are bad Frenchmen. The time has come to close the Bible and open the statute book. ... Take care lest you are sent to the front. If you refuse there, you will run the risk of dying, not by a German bullet, which would be honorable, but by a French bullet, which would be a disgrace."

At the conclusion of the trial the president of the court said, "At the present time the weapons of the spirit are not sufficient to defend our homes." Philippe was sentenced to four years for insubordination and Pierre to two years for refusal to obey orders. The court offered to remit the sentences if they would go to the front. All men and women who honor moral courage, whether they be pacifists or not, will rejoice that these courageous brothers have now been released and restored to their families. No word has been received of Henri Roser, of Paris, secretary of the International F.O.R., who was also imprisoned as a pacifist.

Through the facilities of the International F.O.R. office in London, European pacifists keep in touch with each other as best they can in spite of the fact that frontiers in Europe are nearly everywhere closed, that postal service has ceased except for one or two countries and that enemy censorship is rigid. Telegraphic service is open to unoccupied France and to one or two other European countries and friends communicate across frontiers by this means when possible. Every bit of information is passed on to the London office, where it is pieced together and disseminated as widely as possible. Little is known of German pacifists. It is understood that many of them are in prison.

The Burke-Wadsworth Bill provides for five years imprisonment or a fine of \$10,000 or both for any person "who counsels, aids or abets another to evade registration or service in the land or naval forces or any of the requirements of this act" or its regulations. This provision might be so construed that a minister of the gospel could be punished for advising a man to follow his conscience even if it led him to refuse to register or be drafted. In the face of this situation more than 300 ministers have signed a declaration that "no action of government can abrogate or suspend our obligation as Christian ministers to counsel men in all circumstances to render obedience to conscience and resolutely to do the right as they see it" and declaring "we stand ready to counsel and support in all ways within our power those who may be subjected to difficulty or persecution because they are unable conscientiously to cooperate in the operation of a conscription act." Among the signers are many well known ministers.

Among Disciple signers are Clark Walker Cummings, Harold Fey, Carroll H. Lemon, Harold Lunger, Donald Salmon, Allen D. Stanger, Charles B. Tupper, C. H. Hamlin, Dwight Stevenson, and James A. Crain. For the benefit of others who may wish to sign it the affirmation is reprinted below. Signers may tear it out and send it to Dr. Allan Knight Chalmers, care Fellowship of Reconciliation, 2929 Broadway, New York.

#### AFFIRMATION

We desire to affirm our conviction that no action of government can abrogate or suspend our obligation as Christian ministers to counsel men in all circumstances to render obedience to conscience and resolutely to do the right as they see it. Therefore we must make it clear to our fellow-citizens, and in particular to conscientious objectors to war in any form that we stand ready to counsel and support in all ways within our power those who may be subjected to difficulty or persecution because they are unable conscientiously to cooperate in the operation of a conscription act.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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